



SHEVCHENKO SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY

Letter from the President

26 November 2021

Dear Colleagues, Members of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in the US

Vitaly Chernetsky, our Learned Secretary, and I returned earlier this week from a highly successful annual convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES), where 27 of our members presented papers (or will present in the virtual conference that takes place December 1–3). The excitement and camaraderie among our members was palpable, as our Ukrainian studies field made a strong showing with a new generation of scholars and innovative, groundbreaking research. See the Society's [October Newsletter](#) for a full listing of our members' participation.

In our absence, our Society was once again plunged into a cauldron of sordid accusations, misrepresentations, and innuendo of the type that ought to have been left behind in the émigré politics of the 1950s, but, sadly, is becoming ever more ensconced in our post-truth world. At first it was unclear whether these were personal statements from people with specific interests or perhaps payback from an aggrieved former employee. However, Bohdan Vitvitsky's second letter (November 19) and the most recent communication from Alexander Motyl with the Sxema chart (November 23) make it clear: This is an orchestrated election campaign that seems to have stumbled off the high road with little regard for the dignity and reputation of our Society.

At issue is the following: Do we want to move forward to become a full-fledged,

professional North American academic society, open to new members and new ideas, measuring ourselves against the highest standards of scholarship worldwide, or do we want to remain essentially a private club, where 62 percent of membership is disenfranchised, and access is tightly controlled by a system of induction into academic Sections that has been for years mired in cronyism, and where this Board's recent attempts to introduce a merit-based system has been met with protest, threats of legal action, exhortations to an "us" who know the *hromada*, versus "them," the outsiders. Our Society is at the crossroads of a conceptual and generational change: Can it reform itself into a professional scholarly platform that unites equally all scholars (third-wave, fourth-wave, of all backgrounds with a commitment to our field) and thus avoid the fate of so many postwar émigré organizations? This has been the theme of my earlier letters and throughout my presidency and the vision of the slate that I have the honor to lead. Unfortunately, we are once again diverted by this most recent series of attacks, and I must follow up my [October 28 letter](#) with this reply.

The inflammatory rhetoric of Alexander Motyl's letter is disappointing. The Ukrainian studies presence at Harvard is the envy of and beacon for many other communities, and yet here it is a marker of opprobrium, a threat to the very identity of our Society. The persistent attempts to hold the present Board and myself personally responsible for twelve years of alleged autocratic rule by George Grabowicz, the piling up of four Harvard "bosses" to which I am subordinate, making me incapable of independent action, borders on the misogynist—where have you brave gentlemen been for the past 12 years, why did you not pose these questions during Dr. Popovych's second term (2009–2012; he must be very surprised to learn that he was a mere puppet), and why did you not pose the questions directly to Professor Grabowicz during his two terms (2012–2018)? Finally, to echo Askold Lozynskyj's claim that the internationally renowned scholar Serhii Plokhii, senior Harvard professor, author of over a dozen bestselling, award-winning books, and probably the most recognizable and acclaimed Ukrainian historian in the West is a subordinate of Harvard's *pater familias* George Grabowicz borders on the bizarre—Professor Grabowicz is not that powerful, that scary, and the Shevchenko Scientific Society in the US is not a colonial outpost of his empire.

Three General Meetings approved the collaboration with partners in Ukraine: the Krytyka Institute (Tamara Hundorova, *chlen-korespondent* of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine), the Shevchenko Studies Department (Oleksandr Boron') and the Center for the Study of the Life and Works of Panteleimon Kulish (Oles Fedoruk) at the Institute of Literature, National Academy of Sciences in Ukraine, and, yes, Krytyka Publishers with its superb team of authors, editors, designers, and full intellectual complement. Detailed annual budgets passed Board votes every single one of these years, detailed accounting for expenditures of previous years were provided at the same time, external auditing firms (at no small expense) confirmed that our books were in order, the various Audit Committees conferred dispensation (*absolutoriia*) at General Meetings (2012, 2015, 2018). Our Treasurers Ruslana Rossi (2009–2013) and Natalia Honcharenko (2013–2021) would not have disbursed funds without proper substantiation of costs, thus they, too, are impacted by these blanket slurs along with the respective Boards. There is no need to call the entire membership to action to ask for "detailed breakdowns for direct and indirect

expenditures”; they exist in our records for every book. As an aside, most of the high-quality books produced in this period average out to about \$8000 per book, whereas the Society’s 2009 collection *Contemporary Ukraine on the Cultural Face of Europe* (ed. Onyshkevych and Rewakowicz) published by M.E. Sharpe cost \$18,500 for its production and was then sold by the publisher at \$89 per book.

Vasyl Lopukh, who was a Board member during all of this time, stated during our March 27, 2021 meeting that as President he intended to continue *all* the present Shevchenkiana and Kulishiana projects. What is the meaning, now, of these big red circles around random snippets of budgets (*allocations*, mind you, not actual expenditures), of these graphs, full of inaccuracies, with big red arrows pointing allegedly to the pockets of present Executive Board members? Or of the “discovery” that G. Grabowicz is 95 percent owner of Krytyka publishers, after he himself already corrected Dr. Vitvitsky’s charge of 90 percent ownership to 95, explaining that foreign ownership was the only way of securing the independence of an enterprise in Ukraine (as recent events at *Kyiv Post* bear out) and that such “ownership” of a narrowly focused academic publisher brought him no monetary gain whatsoever, rather the opposite?

I would like to remind the members of the Resolutions passed at the May 2018 General Meeting, which the present Board was tasked with fulfilling. Nos. 3–5 are the most relevant to our present discussion:

3. Продовження активної діяльності шевченкознавства, яке було започатковане Ювілейним проектом—з урахуванням також оточення Шевченка і його сучасників.
4. Враховуючи, що на 2019 р. припадає 200-річчя з дня народження Пантелеймона Куліша належно відзначити цю дату і посилено продовжувати вже існуючі заходи щодо публікацій його творів і праць про нього. Координація з новоствореним Центром дослідження життя і творчості Пантелеймона Куліша при Інституті літератури ім. Шевченка НАНУ.
5. Продовження *Записок НТШ-А, Нова серія*.

The next General Meeting, upon deliberation, can set different priorities, but the present Board cannot be faulted for having maintained the focus on Shevchenkiana and Kulishiana publications, on our wonderful bilingual journal *Записки НТШ-А. Нова серія*, within the already established collaboration with our partners in Ukraine. These publications, which rival the very best in world scholarship, have greatly enhanced our Society’s reputation and put us on the map of serious academic institutions. Having thus set the bar, my own focus is to develop our Sections into true research and networking units of scholars and professionals, to encourage our own members to publish in our journal, to organize projects and conferences, explore new avenues for our activities, and to build on what we have begun. That is why we have introduced “academic vice-presidents” into our proposed executive; why our slate boasts a strong contingent of women—social scientists (a rapidly developing Ukrainian studies field) in complement to our Center for Demographic Research of Ukrainians in the US, of which we are very

proud; why we have renowned writers, musicians, historians, and linguists in our ranks; why we have presented a complex network of committees, each with its own program and vision; why we have representation from UVAN, UCU, and the UIA; and why our slate represents a broad geographic range rather than centering on the immediate New York area. This is how we see the identity of our future Society. As serious adults, we have come here to do serious things.

Respectfully,

Halyna Hryn
President

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